

BOOK REVIEWS

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MARRIED TO MEDICINE: An Intimate Portrait of Doctors' Wives
—Carla Fine. Atheneum Publishers, 597 Fifth Ave., New York, NY (10017), 1981. \$12.95.

Certain cultural experiences appeal to the voyeuristic tendencies in all of us. We are captivated by events or people we may not have had experience with except in film, theater, dance and literature. Reading *Married to Medicine* was a little bit like that for me. It dealt with a world that I knew existed yet had had minimal contact with: the life of the typical physician's wife. Carla Fine's documentation of 100 interviews with wives of physicians was appalling on some levels, tragic on others and basically spellbinding reading.

The book reads easily as it draws amply from verbatim quotes from the author's interviews. Rather than attempting to paraphrase selected comments, this approach personalizes the material and adds an element of credibility to the subject matter. After an introductory chapter the book follows the physician through medical school, residency training and finally into practice. The bulk of the work centers on specific topic areas (for example, "The Public Image of Privilege," "The Sanctity of Medicine," "Sex," "Family Life," "The Stresses of Medicine," "Divorce" and "Career Options").

In nearly every chapter the themes and messages are the same. The "husband considers himself a physician above all else." The wife feels somewhat isolated from her husband's world and develops a publicly self-effacing attitude as a result:

I'm always conscious that if I criticize my husband's compulsive dedication to his work, I will be regarded as a spoiled princess . . . When I have to attend a family gathering or a friend's cocktail party by myself—which is quite often—people will just ooh and aah after they learn my husband's absence is due to the fact that he had to deliver a baby. "How terrific," they'll say. "You must be so proud." Yet if I were married to a lawyer who had stayed home to finish some briefs, their reaction would probably be: "Your husband is really a workaholic. You should get him to relax." I'm in the position of having to smile appreciatively about his accomplishments when deep down I'm really resenting the closeness between my husband and that other woman giving birth. They are sharing a wonderful, glorious experience while I am left alone. If I told other people—except perhaps other doctors' wives—my true feelings, they would be shocked and disgusted.

Fine points out in the chapter entitled "Divorce" that the depth of these feelings is not often discussed between husband and spouse, thus leading to further marital discomfort and occasionally divorce.

Another problematic dynamic is that of the spillover of behavior in various professional settings into family life. Professional deference (rampant for better or worse in most medical environments) becomes an expectation at home for many physicians. They do not see themselves governed by the same rules of conduct as other family members. They expect to be relieved of normal familial responsibilities because they are "too tired" or "work so hard during the day" that they have "little time" to be a nonprofessional even at home.

The portrait of the average American medical family

painted in *Married to Medicine* is profoundly disquieting, shades of "The Stepford Wives." The sentiments echoed throughout the book seem not so much repetitive as hauntingly reminiscent of one another. Few cases are mentioned which stray from the traditional model of a modern medical marriage. This oversight is unfortunate since a number of younger physicians who have sought more balanced life-styles currently exist in most medical communities. Nevertheless Fine's effort is an important contribution to the literature on contemporary American medicine. She proves that we can gain understanding of the physician through the words of those closest to him or her (since she writes of female physicians in Chapter 13). Undoubtedly her interviewees felt little constraint in speaking with her so frankly. It is a tragedy that many of their spouses never seek the same depth of understanding that Fine does. They may need to read the book to find it.

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CURRENT SURGICAL MANAGEMENT OF NEUROLOGIC DISEASE
—Edited by Charles B. Wilson, MD, Professor and Chairman, Department of Neurological Surgery, University of California, San Francisco; and Julian T. Hoff, MD, Professor and Vice Chairman, Department of Neurological Surgery, University of California, San Francisco. Longman Inc., 19 West 44th Street, New York City (10036), 1980. 356 pages, \$39.50.

This book is somewhat unusual in that it is written on the neurosurgical management of neurologic disease but written for physicians who are not neurosurgeons. As a result, the individual sections are somewhat brief and would be too superficial for practicing neurologists or neurosurgeons or house officers. However, it would be an excellent introduction to neurosurgery for medical students and would also be a valuable means of continuing medical education for physicians who deal with some facets of neurologic disease in their practice.

The general topics covered are congenital disorders, neoplastic disease, vascular disorders, trauma, infection of the central nervous system and acquired disorders such as trigeminal neuralgia. In this regard the book is extremely timely and includes a specific chapter on augmentation of collateral cerebral blood flow, an operation which is being increasingly recognized as a treatment for certain types of intracranial vascular disease.

In general, the chapters are well written and clear, and do not abound with esoteric lingo. The book is well edited and the references are, in the most part, timely and relevant. The editors have done an excellent job in recruiting experts to represent each individual topic covered.

Drs. Wilson and Hoff have provided an up-to-date review of current surgical management of neurologic disease, written in such a way that it should be easily understandable to most physicians. It will be interesting to see how the book is accepted by the audience it has been targeted for.

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